



**A National Support, Education
and Advocacy Organization**

Celebrating Family And Its Diversity

More than ever, your voice needs to be heard. It needs to be heard by gay and lesbian people ostracized and targeted. It needs to be heard by families, closeted and alone. It needs to be heard by neighbors and clergy, good people who "don't know anyone gay." It needs to be heard by those who are fearful and those who are mouthing anti-gay slogans in the name of protecting the family. Above all, we need to raise our voices so we can be heard in the struggle for full human rights and respect for all Americans

PFLAG President Mitzi Henderson

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(202) 638 - 4200



My daughter is a lesbian. She also is the light of my life, a warm and talented young woman whose joyous spirit helps brighten the lives of others . . . PFLAG leads us gently through the thickets of wrong-headed conventional wisdom and back to where we belong—at our children's sides . . .

A PFLAG father

PFLAG PROVIDES SUPPORT

Gays and lesbians are the most frequent victims of hate crimes. In a society that is still learning to overcome hostility and accommodate diversity, PFLAG and its affiliates offer families and friends, lesbians, gays and bisexuals, their spouses, children and loved ones a community that will accept and respect them.

Homophobia, not homosexuality, threatens the family and society. PFLAG's regional, national and international conferences bring together families to learn how to provide support in a confidential setting, to share, to celebrate and to strategize about overcoming ignorance and changing society's attitudes.

The mainstream media carries little information on issues of special concern to PFLAG members. The PFLAGpole quarterly newsletter highlights PFLAG activities and the work of families and friends to secure basic human rights for people who are gay, lesbian and bisexual. Other groundbreaking and informative PFLAG publications address timely issues and complex research.



We in PFLAG, family by family, friend by friend, in our school programs and our public demonstrations, are showing the power of one person, one family, one chapter, one organization to make a profound difference.

PFLAG President Mitzi Henderson

PFLAG EDUCATES SOCIETY

The majority of school counselors strongly agree that students are very degrading toward fellow students whom they discover to be gay or lesbian. With insightful publications such as PFLAG's "Respect All Youth" issue papers, PFLAG creates a learning environment in which lesbian, gay and bisexual youth can thrive without fear of harassment and discrimination, and can learn about their culture and community.

From local referenda to federal policies regarding gays in the military, lesbian, gay and bisexual issues frequently top the news. PFLAG families and friends introduce an element of shared humanity to these debates when they stand up and speak out for their loved ones. At times, family members and friends can address issues in ways that might otherwise put their gay, lesbian or bisexual loved ones at risk. By being available to the media, at public forums and for one-on-one conversations, PFLAG members provide information and dispel misconceptions.

Mainstream educational materials, scientific journals and religious teachings often ignore or present harmful, erroneous images of people who are gay, lesbian and bisexual. PFLAG publications, fact sheets, reading lists, audio-tapes, conferences and seminars help dispel myths, report on scientific research, explain religious teachings, and convey personal experiences.

Television and entertainment present a biased picture of gay, lesbian and bisexual people, overemphasizing crime and violence. PFLAG's public information programs present positive family relationships among gays, lesbians and bisexuals, their families and friends.

PFLAG is writing the final chapter in the nation's 200-year-old struggle for civil rights. I don't know if you realize how important you are.

Congressman Gerry Studds

While Congress can enact laws which protect the rights of individuals, it is organizations like PFLAG that can change public attitudes and reduce the need for those protections.

Congressman Thomas C. Sawyer

PFLAG ADVOCATES JUSTICE

Founded by families and friends, PFLAG is first and fundamentally a grassroots organization. Members build and work in local, regional, national and international coalitions to counter threats to their relatives and friends.

In a variety of ways, PFLAG members advocate on behalf of legislation and public policies that will ensure equal rights—not special rights—for their gay, lesbian and bisexual loved ones.

PFLAG's early organizational emphasis on providing mutual support and forums for discussion has provided a rich tradition. Sharing personal stories is especially effective when PFLAG families and friends testify and lobby. They provide the personal experiences and perspectives that can ground public policy regarding gay, lesbian and bisexual issues in reality.



☐ Yes, I want to join PFLAG and support its mission.

The benefits of membership include:

- the welcoming support of families and friends at local meetings.
- quarterly issues of our paper, *The PFLAGpole*.
- opportunities to act against homophobia.
- "Action Alerts" that give you up-to-date information.
- discounts on PFLAG publications.
- invitations to local, regional and national events and conferences.
- voting for national board members.

You may join the national organization of PFLAG as an at-large member or you may join through a local affiliate.

To join as an at-large member, fill out the application below, enclose your \$30 annual dues, and mail the application to:

PFLAG

P.O. Box 96519

Washington, DC 20090 - 6519

To join through a local affiliate, contact the affiliate listed on the reverse of this brochure.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Payment Type: ☐ Check ☐ Money Order ☐ Credit Card

Credit Card Type: _____

Credit Card Number: _____

Expiration Date: _____

Signature: _____

(Charges will appear as "PFLAG" on your credit card statement.)

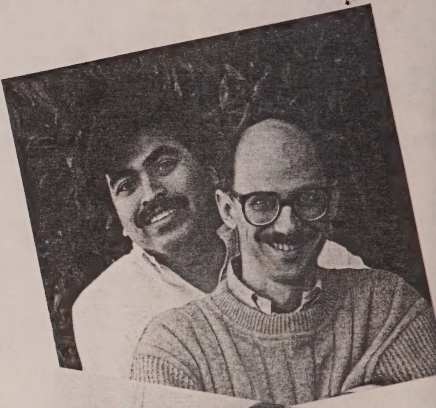
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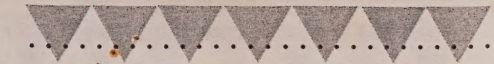
\$30 Dues \$_____ Contribution \$_____ Total

☐ Send me information about a local affiliate in the _____ area.

☐ Send me a list of PFLAG publications.

PFLAG is a tax-exempt, nonprofit 501(c)3 organization that is not affiliated with any political or religious institution.





OUR MISSION

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays promotes the health and well-being of gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons, their families, and friends through: support, to cope with an adverse society; education, to enlighten an ill-informed public; and advocacy, to end discrimination and to secure equal civil rights. Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays provides opportunity for dialogue about sexual orientation, and acts to create a society that is healthy and respectful of human diversity.

IN YOUR AREA

PFLAG affiliates are located in more than 365 communities across the United States and in 11 other countries. For information about PFLAG in your area, contact the local affiliate listed below, or write to PFLAG, 1101 14th Street, N.W., Suite 1030, Washington, DC 20005, or call (202) 638-4200.

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From one family's pain and anger over a brutal hate crime against their gay son has grown a vibrant national family-based organization —



To cope with an
adverse society,
PFLAG
PROVIDES SUPPORT

To enlighten a
sometimes frightened
and ill-informed public,
**PFLAG EDUCATES
AND INFORMS**

To combat discrimination
and secure equal rights,
PFLAG
ADVOCATES JUSTICE

Founded in 1981, PFLAG has become one of the most respected and effective grassroots organizations in the United States. Today, PFLAG represents more than 42,000 families — and speaks for countless others — concerned about society's attitudes toward their gay, lesbian and bisexual loved ones. At the same time it offers opportunities for dialogue about sexual orientation, PFLAG works tirelessly to change public policies and affect attitudes in order to create a tolerant, healthy society that is respectful of diversity.

Marge

P-FLAG

Is Homosexuality a Sin?

Please share this booklet.

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About Parents & Friends of Lesbians and Gays The first group of parents of gay persons was formed in New York in 1973. Shortly thereafter groups formed in Los Angeles and in other parts of the country. In 1981 the Federation was formed, with the acronym Parents FLAG or P-FLAG. Although members are mostly mothers and fathers of lesbians and gay men, other relatives and friends and gays and lesbians are also active members. Everyone is welcome.

Each parents group is a local organization, but each group is concerned with national and international issues as well. Each group's primary objective is to help parents and their gay children to understand and love one another, and to offer mutual support wherever it is needed.

IS HOMOSEXUALITY A SIN?

Purposes of this booklet

Many families have difficulty accepting the sexual orientation of their gay, lesbian, and bisexual members. They believe that homosexuality — loving someone of the same gender — is contrary to God's will. This booklet intends to collect answers from authoritative sources to questions most commonly asked by parents. Our purpose:

- To learn how religious experts in the field answer questions frequently asked by families and friends of gays and lesbians.
- To share these answers with gays and lesbians, their parents and friends, with religious leaders, policy makers, teachers, counselors, judges, physicians, and with all those who interact with our gay and lesbian family members.
- To serve as a resource for those who would like to read more about this topic or wish to join a religious group for gays and lesbians in their area.

What questions did we ask?

We asked all individuals surveyed the following questions:

- 1) In your personal opinion, does God regard homosexuality as a sin?
- 2) In your personal opinion, do the Scriptures object to homosexuality?
- 3) In your personal opinion, does God approve of two gay or lesbian individuals pledging their love to each other in a religious ceremony and raising children who may be born to them or adopted by them?

Whom did we survey?

To find answers to these questions, we contacted prominent religious leaders across the country. We are aware that the three questions we asked are controversial. When discussing homosexuality, the views of priests, ministers, rabbis, and theology scholars may differ widely even among those who belong to the same faith, denomination, parish, or synagogue.

We do not pretend to present a statistical cross-section of the views of the nation's religious leaders. However, we believe the views are representative of a vast body of religious thinkers of a broad range of faiths, who in their search for truth do not necessarily confine themselves to their own faith's literal teachings, but who view ethical and social issues from a broader spiritual and more universal perspective.

We asked those surveyed to give us their personal views, rather than state their faith's formal or informal position on same-gender love. It should, therefore, be stressed that, although the religious affiliations of the respondents are listed, their answers reflect the personal opinions of the writers and not necessarily those of their formal religious affiliation.

Also, nominees were asked not to respond to the survey if they themselves are gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Although we are aware that by so doing we denied this booklet the wisdom of many fine religious scholars in the field, we felt it would prevent any criticism that the answers were biased or self-serving.

It is understood that the word "God" is used in this booklet to describe a spiritual, nonhuman entity, also referred to as Creator, Lord, Yahweh, Ruler of the Universe, or others. It is also understood that the concepts of homosexual, gay, and lesbian individuals include bisexual persons as well. Some of those who responded to our survey pointed out that the concept of "sin" does not exist in their religions, and they were kind enough to adjust their responses accordingly.

Which theologians did we survey?

Baptist

Rev. Dr. William R. Stayton is a certified sexologist; an Assistant Professor of Psychiatric & Human Behavior at Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia, PA; serves on the faculties of LaSalle University's Graduate Department of Religious Studies, Philadelphia, and the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education, Philadelphia; and a private consultant through William R. Stayton & Associates Ltd., Wayne, PA. He received a Bachelor's degree from the University of Redlands, Redlands, CA, a Master's in Divinity from the Andover Newtown Theological School, Newton Center, MA, and a Th.D. in psychology from Boston University, Boston, MA. A member of numerous professional and scientific societies, he is also a Fellow at the Society for the Scientific Study of Sex. Dr. Stayton has authored numerous books and articles on human sexuality and has served as a member of the board of directors of the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors and Therapists, and received its Outstanding Service Award in 1978. He is currently on the board of directors of Sex Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) and is a former president of that organization.

Episcopal

Bishop John S. Spong of the Episcopal Diocese of Newark is the most published member of the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church. He has authored 11 books and over 50 published articles. He was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He received a Master's degree in Divinity and a honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from the Protestant Episcopal Theological Seminary in Virginia. He also received an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from St. Paul's College. He has been president of the Alumni Association of his seminary and a trustee of both his seminary and St. Paul's College. In 1986, he was appointed to serve on the church's Standing Commission on Human Affairs and Health.

Episcopal

Bishop R. Stewart Wood, Jr., was elected Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan in 1988. He is a graduate of Dartmouth College, has a Master's degree in counseling from Ball State University, and earned his Master's and Doctorate of Divinity degrees at Virginia Theological Seminary. He has served pastoral and leadership positions in Indiana, Ohio, and Tennessee. He was elected to the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church, Fund for World Relief, and was a member of the Coalition for the Ordination of Women.

Judaism (Reform)

Rabbi Jeffrey Lazar is an educator at Temple Sinai in Atlanta, Georgia. He has also served in Washington, Ohio, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. He received a Bachelor's degree from Syracuse University, a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Hebrew Letters from Hebrew Union College, and was ordained in 1971. He has contributed numerous articles to professional publications. He is a member of the National Association of Temple Educators where he is a trustee and a past editor of the newsletter.

Judaism (Reform)

Rabbi Janet R. Marder is Associate Director for the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Pacific Southwest Council, in Los Angeles. She graduated from the University of California at Santa Cruz and was ordained in 1979 by the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York. She became the first ordained Rabbi of Congregation Beth Chayim Chadashim (House of New Life, a synagogue serving the gay and lesbian Jews of Los Angeles). While there, she developed programs reaching out to gay and lesbian Jews and became co-chair of NECHAMA ("comfort"), a program of AIDS education for the Jewish community. She also staffs the Union of American Hebrew Congregations' regional and national committee on AIDS.

Judaism (Reconstructionist)

Rabbi Dr. David Teutsch, Ph.D., is executive vice president and director of contemporary civilization at Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Wyncote, Pennsylvania, and former dean of admissions. He received a Bachelor's degree in general studies from Harvard University, a Master's degree in Hebrew literature from Hebrew Union College, and a Ph.D. in social system sciences from the University of Pennsylvania. He is a former executive director of the Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations. Dr. Teutsch is a current board member of the National Havurah Committee and an editorial board member of *Reconstructionist* magazine. He has edited books and articles in various publications, including a prayer book series.

Judaism (Independent Traditional)

Rabbi Marc H. Wilson is Rabbi at Temple Israel in Charlotte, North Carolina. He earned a Bachelor's degree in sociology from DePaul University and a Bachelor in Hebrew Literature, ordination, and a Hebrew Teacher and Principal license from Hebrew Theological College. He attended graduate school at the Chicago Institute of Pastoral Care and the Georgia State University Law School. His recent accomplishments include founding board member for the Brothers Foundation Shelter for AIDS Patients and President of the Charlotte Area Clergy Association. In 1983 he received the Atlanta Journal and Constitution's Public Servant of the Year and B'nai B'rith's Distinguished Service Award for his work with the homeless. He is also a columnist appearing in nine newspapers and one news wire service.

Lutheran

Bishop Stanley E. Olson is a retired pastor and bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. He served as bishop of the Pacific Southwest Synod of the Lutheran Church in America for nine years. His undergraduate degree is from Wittenberg University in Ohio, and his seminary training was at Luther-Northwestern Seminary in Minnesota. He holds an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from California Lutheran University. During his 39 years in the ordained ministry, he served as pastor of three congregations in Arizona and California, and as assistant to three bishops. He has been an active supporter of Lutherans Concerned, an unofficial Lutheran support group for gay and lesbian members of all Lutheran denominations.

Former Mormon

Dr. Carl O. McGrath, Ph.D., was a member of the Mormon Church for 50 years. He served a 2-year mission in England from 1959-1961. In 1979 he was ordained a bishop and served in that capacity for five years. He served in many other Mormon leadership capacities, including a Stake High Councillor. In 1989, Dr. McGrath resigned his membership in the Mormon Church because of the Church's position against homosexuality. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of Washington, Washington State, where he currently serves as a Clinical Assistant Professor.

Presbyterian

Rev. Dr. George R. Edwards, Ph.D., is Professor Emeritus of New Testament Theology at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. He earned a Master's in Divinity at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, and his Ph.D. at Duke University. He has also done further studies in both Germany and Canada. Dr. Edwards taught New Testament Theology at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary from 1958-1985. Dr. Edwards has written various books on new themes, including biblical perspectives on sexuality. He is a member of the Presbytery of Louisville, Fellowship of Reconciliation, and Society of biblical Literature.

Presbyterian

Rev. Harry L. Holfelder is the Senior Pastor of the First and Franklin Street Presbyterian Church, Baltimore, MD. Rev. Holfelder is chair of the AIDS Interfaith Network of Baltimore and active with the Maryland Interfaith Legislative Committee.

Roman Catholic

Sister Mary Ann Ford has been a member of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary for 39 years. She holds Master's degrees in mathematics and in Pastoral Ministry. Sister Mary Ann has taught high school and college in the fields of mathematics and religious studies. For the past 15 years she has served as Chaplain to Dignity/Detroit, the gay and lesbian Catholic organization.

Roman Catholic

Sister Jeannine Gramick Ph.D. has been a member of the School Sisters of Notre Dame since 1960. She holds a Ph.D. in Education from the University of Pennsylvania. Sister Gramick taught in junior and senior high schools, and was an Assistant Professor of Mathematics and Education at the College of Notre Dame of Maryland. In 1971, while engaged in graduate studies, Sister Gramick became involved in pastoral outreach to the lesbian and gay community. In 1977 she co-founded New Ways Ministry, a social justice center working for the reconciliation of sexual minorities and the church. She currently conducts workshops across the country on the theological, sociological and ministerial dimensions of homosexuality.

Roman Catholic

Rev. C. Robert Nugent co-founded and served as co-director of New Ways Ministry, a national reconciliation ministry for the church and lesbian and gay people. In 1988 he co-edited *The Vatican and Homosexuality*. He also served as co-director of the Social Justice Center in Washington, DC. He received a degree from St. Charles College in Philadelphia, PA; a degree from St. Charles Theologate in Philadelphia; a degree in library science from Villanova University in Philadelphia; and a Master of Sacred Theology from Yale University Divinity School, New Haven, CT. He is a facilitator of the recent seminar series "Homophobia in Religion and Society," sponsored by The Center for Homophobia Education.

Unitarian Universalist

Rev. Dr. William F. Schulz, D.D., is president of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, elected in 1985. He is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Oberlin College. He received a Master's degree in philosophy from the University of Chicago and Doctor of Ministry and Doctor of Divinity degrees from Meadville-Lombard Theological School. Before his election, he served as Director of Social Responsibility and as Executive Vice President of the Association. He serves on the board of several organizations including People for the American Way and Americans United for the Separation of Church and State. Rev. Schulz is the author of numerous books and published articles. He frequently appears on national radio programs and in nationally distributed newspapers and is listed in *Who's Who in America*.

United Church of Christ

Dr. Karen Lebacqz, Ph.D., is Professor of Christian Ethics for the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, CA. Dr. Lebacqz received a Bachelor's degree in Biblical history from Wellesley College, and a Master's degree and Ph.D. in religion and society from Harvard University. She has authored numerous articles, chapters, and books and is a national speaker on ethics and sexuality. Lebacqz is a Fellow of the Hastings Center, a member of Phi Beta Kappa, and past president of the Society of Christian Ethics. She is former Chair of the Board of the Park Ridge Center for the Study of Health, Faith, and Ethics and currently serves on their academic advisory committee.

United Church of Christ

Rev. Dr. James B. Nelson, Ph.D., is Professor of Christian Ethics for the United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, New Brighton, MN. He received a Bachelor's degree from Macalester College. He also received a Bachelor of Divinity degree, Master's degree, and Ph.D. from Yale University. He was a visiting scholar at Oxford University and Cambridge University as well as visiting professor for numerous schools and universities. He has also lectured in eight foreign countries, including England, Israel, and Japan. He has authored numerous books, chapters, and articles. He has been a consulting editor for *Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality* and a council member of the Minnesota AIDS Funding Consortium. His professional honors include Doctor of Sacred Theology from Dickinson University and "Excellence in Teaching Award," General Synod, United Church of Christ.

United Methodist

Rev. Dr. Professor John B. Cobb, Jr., Ph.D., recently retired as Ingraham Professor of Theology at the School of Theology at Claremont and an Avery Professor at Claremont Graduate School, CA. He received his Master's and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Chicago Divinity School. Past positions include teaching at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University, Georgia, and as a Fulbright Professor at the University of Mainz, Germany. Born in Japan, where his parents were Methodist missionaries, Dr. Cobb also taught as a visiting professor at Rikkyo University of Tokyo in 1978.

United Methodist

Bishop Melvin Wheatley, Jr., is an ordained elder of the United Methodist Church who retired in 1984 after 33 years as pastor to congregations in Delaware and California, and 12 years as bishop of the Denver area. He and his wife, as parents of a gay son, have been working over the past decade for open and affirming relations among gay and nongay persons inside the church as well as out. Because he continued a gay man as pastor of a congregation, charges were brought against him by members of his denomination. These charges were unanimously dismissed as invalid. Due to his work in the United Methodist Church, the Federation of Parents FLAG made him an Honorary Director.

How did the respondents answer?

Question #1: *In your opinion, does God regard homosexuality as a sin?*

Baptist: Dr. Stayton — Absolutely not! There is nothing in the Bible or in my own theology that would lead me to believe that God regards homosexuality as sin. God is interested in our relationships with ourselves, others, the things in our lives, and with God. (Matt. 23:36-40). There is nothing in the mind of God that could be against a loving, sexual relationship, freely entered into, without coercion, among sincere adults whether gay, bisexual, or straight.

Episcopalian: Bishop Spong — Some argue that since homosexual behavior is “unnatural,” it is contrary to the order of creation. Behind this pronouncement are stereotypic definitions of masculinity and femininity that reflect the rigid gender categories of patriarchal society. There is nothing unnatural about any shared love, even between two of the same gender, if that experience calls both partners into a fuller state of being. Contemporary research is uncovering new facts that are producing a rising conviction that homosexuality, far from being a sickness, sin, perversion or unnatural act, is a healthy, natural, and affirming form of human sexuality for some people. Findings indicate that homosexuality is a given fact in the nature of a significant portion of people, and that it is unchangeable.

Our prejudice rejects people or things outside our understanding. But the God of creation speaks and declares, “I have looked out on *everything* I have made and ‘behold it (is) very good’.” (Gen. 1:31) The word of God in Christ says that we are loved, valued, redeemed, and counted as precious no matter how we might be valued by a prejudiced world.

Episcopalian: Bishop Wood — No. Our sexual orientation is a given, something we discover about ourselves — some might say “a gift from God.” How one relates to others — caring or exploiting — is the source of sin.

Lutheran: Bishop Olson — Of course not. God could (not?) care less about humanly devised categories that label and demean those who do not somehow fit into the norm of those in control. God made all of us and did not make all of us alike. Diversity is beautiful in creation. How we live our lives in either affirming or destructive ways is God’s concern, but being either homosexually oriented or heterosexually oriented is neither a divine plus or minus.

The New Testament is full of verses that speak of the work of Jesus Christ in creating a new unity beyond our divisions. Paul writes, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:27,28). The Gospel is vastly more inclusive than we often imagine or have been taught.

Judaism: Rabbi Lazar — First of all, I do not know what God thinks. In my opinion, homosexuality is not a sin, but an alternate lifestyle. In my opinion, homosexuality by itself is not immoral. When sex is used to corrupt, for prurient and/or exploitative purposes or selfish reasons or to hurt someone else, this is immoral.

Judaism: Rabbi Marder — The God I worship endorses loving, committed, monogamous relationships, regardless of the gender of those involved.

Judaism (Reconstructionist): Rabbi Dr. Teutsch — Homosexuality — as is true of heterosexuality — is a naturally occurring sexual orientation that can be expressed in more ethical and less ethical ways. In itself homosexual love making is not sinful.

Judaism: Rabbi Wilson — No, not so long as the behavior is

- a) not obsessive (as would be true, likewise, of heterosexuality)
- b) responsible and safe (ditto as above)
- c) non-abusive (ditto as above)
- d) the manifestation of a loving, respectful relationship (Jewish Bible, Old Testament)

Former Mormon: Dr. McGrath — My sexuality is a God-given state of being which includes natural erotic attractions and desires. In moving from infancy to adulthood, part of my work is to allow myself to experience my eroticism in ways that enable me to discover who I actually am, not who society says I should be. I believe that the Creator of our natural erotic attractions, whether they are for opposite or same sex persons, views our eroticism as an intrinsic and beautiful part of who God intended us to be. God did not intend that there would be one way of being sexual. Even among heterosexual people, there is no one “right” way to be sexual. Our uniqueness comes from the creativity of God at the most basic level. I believe God is pleased when we respond to our unique form of sexuality in ways that are life giving. I believe that it is life giving when sexual relationships reflect a high degree of mutuality, love, and justice.

Presbyterian: Dr. Edwards — God does not regard homosexuality as a sin any more than heterosexuality. Sin is lack of respect or love for God; it is lack of love or respect for other persons. Whether gay or straight, therefore, one *may* sin against God or others. But God forgives us when we sin and strengthens us in resisting sin. We are led by God’s forgiving love to become more respectful and loving toward God and toward others, even those we don’t “like.”

Presbyterian: Rev. Holfelder — No, I do not think that God regards homosexuality as a sin. I believe that one's sexual preference is first and foremost a matter of biology (creation) and only secondarily a matter of choice (responsibility). Since I also believe that all God creates is good, I conclude that human sexuality (not a matter of choice for anyone) is good, whether that sexual expression be heterosexual or homosexual.

Roman Catholic: Sister Ford — Two truths are especially relevant in thinking this through. First we have a theological point. God, the one who has made all of creation, loves and cherishes all creatures without exception. Second, modern psychology shows us that homosexual orientation is set by age five or six. Most psychologists agree that it is not a matter of choice; whether orientation is inborn as some think, or acquired very early, as others say. How then could an all-loving God possibly violate Divine nature and regard homosexuals as "sinners?"

Roman Catholic: Sister Gramick — God has created people with romantic and physical attractions to the same sex, as well as those with attractions to the opposite sex. Many, if not most, people, we are now discovering, have both kinds of attractions in varying degrees. All of these feelings are natural and are considered good and blessed by God. These feelings and attractions are not sinful.

Most Catholic moral theologians now hold that homogenital behavior, as well as heterogenital behavior, is good and holy in God's sight when it is an expression of a special and unique love which one person has for another. Both homosexual and heterosexual genital expression can be sinful if they are manipulative, dishonest, or unloving actions.

Roman Catholic: Rev. Nugent — I do not believe that God regards homosexuality as a "sin" if homosexuality means the psychosexual identity of lesbians or gay persons, which we know from contemporary scientific studies is within the boundaries of healthy, human psychological development, and which seems to be as natural for some people as heterosexuality is for others. If homosexuality means the emotional, intimate bonding in same-gender relationships of love and friendship, I believe that since God is love, where there is authentic love, God is present.

Where God is present, there can be no sin. If homosexuality means same-gender erotic, physical expressions of union and pleasure, the possibility of personal sin exists in homosexuality — as it does in heterosexuality — depending on the interplay of three factors including the physical behavior itself and its meaning for the person, the personal motives and intentions of the person acting, and the individual and social consequences or results of the behavior. For many people, sexual behavior which is exploitative, coercive, manipulative, dishonest, selfish or destructive of human personhood is sinful; for all people "sin" means freely acting contrary to one's deeply held moral or ethical convictions, whether these come from organized religion or a personally developed value system. In speaking of the "sinfulness" of same-gender genital expression, the Roman Catholic Bishops of Washington say that "...no one except Almighty God can make certain judgments about the personal sinfulness of acts (*The Prejudice Against Homosexuals and the Ministry of the Church*, Washington State Catholic Conference, 1983.)"

Unitarian Universalist: Dr. Schulz — I do not believe that God regards homosexuality as a sin. In the first place, of course, I do not believe in an anthropomorphic God who defines or delineates sinful behavior. But even if I did, I cannot believe that such a God would reject any of His/Her children on the basis of their affectional orientations. If He/She did, such a God would not be one to whom I would want to pay homage.

United Church of Christ: Dr. Lebacqz — What God DOES regard as a sin is oppression, injustice, persecution, disrespect for persons. This sin, then, is homophobia, gay-bashing, discriminatory legislation toward lesbians and gays, refusal to include lesbian/gay/bisexual people into our churches and communities. To force ANY people, whether for reasons of race, age, or sexual orientation, into a “ghetto” — this is a sin.

United Church of Christ: Dr. Nelson — I am convinced that our sexuality and our sexual orientations, whatever they may be, are a gift from God. Sexual sin does not reside in our orientations, but rather in expressing our sexuality in ways that harm, oppress, or use others for our own selfish gratification. When we express ourselves sexually in ways that are loving and just, faithful and responsible, then I am convinced that God celebrates our sexuality, whatever our orientation may be.

United Methodist: Dr. Cobb — Surely being attracted to persons of the same sex is not, as such, a sin. But of course how we act in our attractions, towards whichever sex, is often sinful. The ideal is to be responsible and faithful rather than self-indulgent. Unfortunately, society does not encourage responsible and faithful relations with persons of the same sex. That makes the situation of the homosexual very difficult.

United Methodist: Bishop Wheatley — Of course not! The preponderance of evidence now available identifies homosexuality to be as natural a sexual orientation for a significant percentage of persons as heterosexuality is the natural sex orientation for the majority of persons. Homosexuality is an authentic condition of being with which some persons are endowed (a gift of God, if you please), not an optional sexual life-style which they have willfully, whimsically or sinfully chosen. Certainly one's sexuality — heterosexual or homosexual — may be acted out in behaviors that are sinful: brutal, exploitative, selfish, superficial. But just as surely, one's homosexual orientation as well as another's heterosexual orientation may be acted out in ways that are beautiful: tender, considerate, mutual, responsible, loyal, profound.

Question #2: *In your opinion, do the Scriptures object to homosexuality?*

Baptist: Dr. Stayton — There is *nothing* in the Bible regarding homosexual orientation. In fact, the Bible does not concern itself with sexual orientation. It does speak out probably against gang rape, male prostitution for religious purposes, and pederasty (sex between an adult and youth). I lead Bible study programs on this subject and am convinced that the Bible does not address the issue of a person's sexual orientation.

Episcopalian: Bishop Spong — There are few biblical references to homosexuality. The first, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, is often quoted to prove that the Bible condemns homosexuality. But the real sin of Sodom was the unwillingness of the city's men to observe the laws of hospitality. The intention was to insult the stranger by forcing him to take the female role in the sex act. The biblical narrative approves Lot's offer of his virgin daughters to satisfy the sexual demands of the mob. How many would say, “*This* is the word of the Lord?” When the Bible is quoted literally, it might be well for the one quoting to read the text in its entirety.

Leviticus, in the Hebrew Scriptures, condemns homosexual behavior, at least for males.

Yet, "abomination," the word Leviticus uses to describe homosexuality, is the same word used to describe a menstruating woman.

Paul is the most quoted source in the battle to condemn homosexuality (in Rom. 1:26-27 and in I Corinthians 6:9-11). But homosexual activity was regarded by Paul as a punishment visited upon idolaters by God because of their unfaithfulness. Homosexuality was not the sin but the punishment.

In I Corinthians 6:9-11, Paul gave a list of those who would not inherit the kingdom of God. That list included the immoral, idolaters, adulterers, sexual perverts, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers and robbers. Sexual perverts is a translation of two words; it is possible that the juxtaposition of *malakos*, the soft, effeminate word, with *arsenokoitus*, or male prostitute, was meant to refer to the passive and active males in a homosexual liaison.

Thus, it appears that Paul would not approve of homosexual behavior. But was Paul's opinion about homosexuality accurate, or was it limited by the lack of scientific knowledge in his day and infected by prejudice born of ignorance? An examination of some of Paul's other assumptions and conclusions will help answer this question. Who today would share Paul's anti-Semitic attitude, his belief that the authority of the state was not to be challenged, or that all women ought to be veiled? In these attitudes Paul's thinking has been challenged and transcended even by the church. Is Paul's commentary on homosexuality more absolute than some of his other antiquated, culturally conditioned ideas?

Three other references in the New Testament (in Timothy, Jude and II Peter) appear to be limited to condemnation of male sex slaves in the first instance, and to showing examples (Sodom and Gomorrah) of God's destruction of unbelievers and heretics (in Jude and II Peter respectively).

That is all that Scripture has to say about homosexuality. Even if one is a biblical literalist, these references do not build an ironclad case for condemnation. If one is not a biblical literalist there is no case at all, nothing but prejudice born of ignorance, that attacks people whose only crime is to be born with an unchangeable sexual predisposition toward those of their own sex.

Episcopalian: Bishop Wood — I am aware of the concern for certain homosexual acts and see no addressing of the condition or orientation [in the Scriptures].

Judaism: Rabbi Lazar — The Bible, in my opinion, is very clear in its objection to homosexuality.

Judaism: Rabbi Marder — I believe that the Hebrew Bible strongly condemns homosexuality. While it is part of my tradition, I do not regard all Biblical laws as binding on me. The Biblical condemnation of homosexuality is based on human ignorance, suspicion of those who are different, and an overwhelming concern for ensuring the survival of the people. Since the Bible regards homosexuality as a capital crime, it clearly assumes that homosexuality is a matter of free choice, a deliberate rebellion against God. We have learned from modern science that people do not choose to be gay or straight; hence it is neither logical nor moral to condemn those whose nature it is to be gay or lesbian.

Judaism: Rabbi Dr. Teutsch — The Scriptural references to homosexuality make no comment on lesbianism. They object to male homosexuality on three grounds: cultic prostitution, unnaturalness, and "spilling seed" or Onanism. Homosexuality has been shown to be natural in animals and humans. Gay men today are not involved in cultic acts. And the spilling of the seed through heterosexual, homosexual, or masturbatory acts is not an issue for me. Thus I take this prohibition no more seriously than many others, such as that against lending money at interest, that do not make sense in this time and place.

Judaism: Rabbi Wilson — Only insofar as that at *that time* homosexual behavior was a manifestation of abusive sexual practices associated with idolatry and fertility cultism, and thus an “abomination” because of the association, not because of the intrinsic “relationship.” Also, because it was “unnatural,” that is non-procreative, understandably in the *tribal* times when procreation was of highest priority.

Lutheran: Bishop Olson — Biblical scholars are busy restudying the few verses which have often been regarded as anti-homosexual. One thing is clear, these few verses do not refer to homosexuality as we understand and use that term today. The Biblical texts do speak against sexual exploitation and rape whether committed by persons with a heterosexual or homosexual orientation. The great message of Scripture is of a God of unbounded love for the human family. If God has any preference at all, it is for “the least,” “the lost” and “the last.” God’s amazing grace, compassion, and salvation is open to everyone. Jesus is very clear in placing his gospel beyond the limitations of churches and denominations. He says, “I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd.” (John 10:16) Here is a partial list of verses that has every right in being equally addressed to homosexual or heterosexual Christians: John 3:16, Galatians 3:27, Ephesians 2:8,9, Romans 3:21-24, Acts 10.

Former Mormon: Dr. McGrath — The Scriptures of my religious tradition include the *Holy Bible*, *Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine and Covenants*, and *Pearl of Great Price*. There are five references in the Bible that I grew up believing to be Scriptural proof against homosexuality. However, I now believe it would be a mistake to rely upon these references in forming my conclusions about homosexuality for the following reasons:

- A. What I have learned from living my life is that those references in the Bible are not speaking to the truth I have experienced in relation to how God views homosexual love.
- B. Although the General Authorities of my Church have expressed strong negative opinions about homosexuality, none of our latter day Prophets have proclaimed revelation from God on this issue, including President Spencer W. Kimball who has probably been the most outspoken on this topic.
- C. None of the words we attribute to Christ make any reference to homosexuality.
- D. None of the latter-day Scriptures make any reference to homosexuality.

Presbyterian: Dr. Edwards — The Scriptures are very important because they teach us God’s love for all, gay or straight. But the Scriptures are old, thousands of years old, written even before the word “homosexual” existed. Same sex acts involving the genitals — we call these “homogenital” — seem in Scripture to be thought of as the result of idol worship. See, for example, Romans 1:18-27. Nor do the Scriptures seem to understand what we mean today by “sexual orientation.” Sexual acts which are injurious, disrespectful, or unloving toward the other person are wrong. So I believe that the Scriptures approve of homosexuality and even homogenital acts that are kind, generous, loving, and respectful of the other person, just as in the case of heterosexuality and heterogenital acts.

Presbyterian: Rev. Holfelder — A careful and sensitive reading of the Scriptures does not lead to the automatic conclusion that homosexuality is a sin. There are passages, especially in the “holiness literature” that suggest this conclusion. However, the overall message of Scripture in this matter is far more positive than negative. Biblically, the issue is the goodness of human sexuality and the use of that gift in covenant relationship. For me a more important question is

that of the relationship of God in Christ to a human being. In that relationship I see no barriers, even sexual ones.

Roman Catholic: Sister Ford — Contemporary Biblical scholars are indicating that the idea of homosexual orientation was unknown to the writers of the Sacred Scripture. Certainly they had no knowledge of the Kinsey research which established the existence of a continuum along which all of us are somewhere between the end points of totally heterosexual through bisexuality to exclusively homosexual. Many of the oft-quoted “condemnatory passages” may assume that heterosexuals are acting out of violation of their “nature.” There also is question as to whether words which appear in our English texts refer in some cases in the original languages not to homosexuals but to male prostitutes which were used in pagan worship. Certainly, nowhere does the Bible legislate on the matter of loving sexual activity between consenting adults in committed relationships.

Roman Catholic: Sister Gramick — When read at face value, the Scriptures have nothing positive to say about homogenital behavior. However, most Christians do not interpret the Bible literally; they try to understand the Scriptures in their historical and cultural context and see what meaning the Scriptures have for us today.

The Scriptures were written approximately 2,000 or more years ago when there was no knowledge of constitutional homosexuality. The Scripture writers believed that all people were naturally heterosexual so that they viewed homosexual activity as unnatural.

Women today are pointing out that the inferiority of women expressed in the Scriptures was a product of the culture and the times in which the Bible was written; it should not be followed today, now that we are beginning to appreciate the natural and God-given equality of men and women.

Similarly, as we know that homosexuality is just as natural and God-given as heterosexuality, we realize that the Biblical injunctions against homosexuality were conditioned by the attitudes and beliefs about this form of sexual expression which were held by people without benefit of centuries of scientific knowledge and understanding.

It is unfair of us to expect or impose a twentieth century mentality and understanding about equality of genders, races, and sexual orientations on the Biblical writers. We must be able to distinguish the eternal truths the Bible is meant to convey from the cultural forms and attitudes expressed there.

Roman Catholic: Rev. Nugent — Catholicism uses four major sources for principles and guidance in ethical questions like homosexuality: scripture, tradition (theologians, church documents, official teachings, etc.), reason, and human experience. All are used in conjunction with one another. Scripture is a fundamental and primary authoritative Catholic source—but not the *only* source. Biblical witness is taken seriously, but not literally. An individual scriptural text must be understood in the larger context of the original language and culture, the various levels of meanings, and the texts’ applications to contemporary realities in light of the role of the community’s and its official leadership role in providing authoritative interpretations. Both Jewish and Christian scriptures do speak negatively of certain forms of same-gender (generally male) sexual *behavior* (not same-gender *love*), especially when associated with idol worship, lust, violence, degradation, prostitution, etc. Whether scriptures condemn all and every form of same-gender sexual expression *in and of itself* for all times, places and individuals is the topic of serious theological and Biblical discussion and debate. Same-gender expressions of responsible, faithful love in a covenanted relationship between two truly homosexually oriented people not gifted with celibacy is not something envisioned by scriptures. Whether this form of homosexual-

ity violates biblical or anthropological principles of sexuality and personhood—especially in light of current scientific knowledge and human experience about the homosexual orientation—is a key issue facing the churches and religious groups today.

Unitarian Universalist: Dr. Schulz — While the Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures) certainly condemns what it refers to as sodomy, it also condemns a whole host of other practices (e.g., sleeping with a menstruating woman) which have long been accepted as reputable. Most of the Old Testament is surely not an appropriate resource from which to obtain guidance regarding contemporary ethics! Turning to the New Testament, we discover that Jesus has nothing whatsoever to say regarding homosexuality. Inasmuch as he frequently condemned others of whose behavior he disapproved (e.g., the money-changers in the temple), it is significant that he makes no reference to homosexuals or their practices.

United Church of Christ: Dr. Lebacqz — Yes and No. Yes, in the same sense that the Scriptures object to wearing clothes of different fabrics, eating pork or other kinds of meat, and women speaking in church. That is to say, the Scriptures are a human product which reflect the cultural limitations of their time. Thus, they speak negatively about a number of practices that are routinely accepted today, including certain sexual practices. Some of these sexual practices are engaged in by both heterosexually and homosexually oriented people.

No, in the same sense that the Scriptures do not speak clearly to the phenomenon that we today call “homosexuality.” That is, Scripture speaks negatively about certain *behaviors*, most notably temple prostitution, not about basic *orientation* or about loving and committed gay/lesbian *relationships*. (A possible exception here is the praise of the relationship between David and Jonathan.)

United Church of Christ: Dr. Nelson — The Scriptures actually say nothing about homosexuality as a psycho-sexual orientation. Our understandings of sexual orientation are distinctly modern ones that were not present in the minds of Scripture writers. A few passages of Scripture (seven at the most) object to certain types of same-sex expressions or acts. The particular acts in question, however, are sexual expressions which are exploitative, oppressive, commercialized, or offensive to ancient purity rituals. There is no Scriptural guidance for same-sex relationships which are loving and mutually respecting. Guidance for these relationships should come from the same general Scriptural norms that apply to heterosexual relationships.

United Methodist: Dr. Cobb — Certainly some of the Biblical writers objected to homosexual acts, but there is surprisingly little attention to this topic. The opposition of the church comes from other sources much more than from scripture. There are more scriptural reasons to oppose homophobia than to oppose homosexuality.

United Methodist: Bishop Wheatley — The Scriptures at no point deal with homosexuality as an authentic sexual orientation, a given condition of being. The remarkably few Scriptural references to “homosexuality” deal rather with homosexual acts, not with homosexual orientation. Those acts are labeled as wrong out of the context of the times in which the writers wrote and perceived those acts to be either nonmasculine, idolatrous, exploitative, or pagan. The kind of relationships between two consenting adults of the same sex demonstrably abounding among us — relationships that are responsible and mutual, affirming and fulfilling — are not dealt with in the Scriptures. Dealing with those relational realities is one of the tasks we are about in our time.

Question #3: *In your opinion, does God approve of two gay or lesbian individuals pledging their love to each other in a religious ceremony and raising children who may be born to them or adopted by them?*

Baptist: Dr. Stayton — Absolutely. God's concern must be that we are good and loving parents, whether gay or straight, and that we bring our children up to be independent of us, loving individuals with a value system that strives to accept, understand, and love all that is good.

Episcopalian: Bishop Spong — I regard the blessing of gay or lesbian couples by the church to be inevitable, right, and a positive good. We must be willing to relinquish prejudice and turn our attention to loving our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters, supporting them, and relating to them as a part of God's good creation. That will inevitably include accepting, affirming and blessing those gay and lesbian relationships that, like all holy relationships, produce the fruits of the spirit — love, joy, peace, patience, and self-sacrifice — and to do so in the confidence that though this may not be in accordance with the literal letter of the Biblical texts, it is in touch with the life-giving spirit that always breaks the bondage of literalism.

This is a step the church must take *for the church's sake*, to be cleansed from our sin of complicity in their oppression. We need to affirm God's Word in creation that "it is not good for man (woman) to live alone." It is this Word of God that calls us to act now.

"In Christ," said Paul, "shall all be made alive." Yes, *all*, including the gay and lesbian couples who have become in Christ one flesh. *Now* is the time to break the bondage of this prejudice that prevents that gift of life promised to all by the Christ from being realized.

Episcopalian: Bishop Wood — Yes. The image of relationships God seeks for us is clear: self-giving, caring, faithful.

Judaism: Rabbi Lazar — Again, I don't pretend to know whether God approves of this. I do believe there are many more significant issues moral in character that are worthy of consideration. I do believe there are people who impose their religious fundamental beliefs on others and to me that is immoral.

Judaism: Rabbi Marder — (See #1 above.) **Question 1:** In your opinion, does God regard homosexuality as a sin? **Answer:** The God I worship endorses loving, committed, monogamous relationships, regardless of the gender of those involved.

Judaism: Rabbi Dr. Teutsch — Yes. The ideal religious way is one of long-term mutual commitment in a family setting. Those who have not obtained it deserve no condemnation; those who create permanent relationships and/or are raising children deserve our fullest support.

Judaism: Rabbi Wilson — The Eternal is near to all who call upon Him/Her, to all who call upon Him/Her sincerely (Psalm 145). I am ambivalent about my own involvement in such a ceremony. I certainly do not object to their "raising children." Let love, honor, respect, caring, and sensitivity be the criteria.

Lutheran: Bishop Olson — The Church has many liturgies of blessing as people dedicate themselves, their special places, and their possessions to God. Religious leaders are asked to invoke God's blessings on farms, homes, cemeteries, and people's pets. Prayers are

offered at football games, conventions, and public gatherings of all types. What is so strange then about blessing the covenant of fidelity of two committed and loving persons who are gay or lesbian? If the home and family they seek to create is a place of love, sacrifice, fidelity and mutual respect, it is surely a fit place for the raising of children. It would be desirable that all children had secure and loving homes in which to grow to maturity. With a critical shortage of such homes it would be a mistake to eliminate some homes simply because they do not conform to a stereotype of one type of Christian home. Home is where there is love and respect and commitment to the full life and development of all who live within that dwelling.

Former Mormon: Dr. McGrath — God approves of all relationships that are life-giving. Relationships encourage and support fullness of life when there is firm commitment to mutuality, love and justice. My experience with gay couples and lesbian couples who have pledged their love to each other has taught me that they are no less capable than heterosexual couples in creating life-giving relationships into which children can be nurtured and loved. One's erotic sexual orientation has nothing to do with the ability to provide the parenting a child needs. I believe people within my religious tradition have the historical and philosophical foundation to provide a community which includes all persons who want to grow in their capacity for love and justice in their relationships.

Presbyterian: Dr. Edwards — Enduring love relationships require maturity. A religious celebration of a love relationship is disrespectful of God if the persons involved are not mature enough to maintain a lasting unity based on mutual respect. Nor should children be subjected to a home where enduring love is not assured. Where unselfish, enduring love is present, however, a religious ceremony and parenting are approved by God.

Counseling by a qualified minister, priest, or rabbi is always advisable before such ceremonies and parenting. Respect should also be shown for the "political" realities of the clergyperson's work, and a private ceremony may be the better alternative in many present situations, even if it involves a compromise.

Presbyterian: Rev. Holfelder — In holy unions as in marriages, I think that the primary issue is that of making a covenant. Those in covenant relationships create the right atmosphere in which to share their sexuality and in which to rear children. It seems to me that the role of the church (or religious community) is to support and affirm those living in "covenant" relationships.

Roman Catholic: Sister Ford — An important question each one of us must ask ourselves is, "What is the most wholesome way for me to grow as an individual?" Wholeness and holiness are two forms of the same word. For most persons, to live in relationship with one other individual has been the most challenging, demanding but also rewarding and enriching path to fullness of human development. Certainly this lifestyle is far superior to others such as a life of prostitution or promiscuity, or the choice to commit suicide rising from lack of self-regard and hope. By comparison these other "choices" would be better labeled "non-options." God *expects* us to live the very best lives we each possibly can. Statistics have shown that sexual orientation of the children is not affected by that of those doing the parenting and their mental health is not compromised by living with homosexual parents as long as those individuals provide love and efforts at good parenting. These youngsters have every chance of growing up with both high moral values and personal stability. The couple may have difficulty finding a main-line church which will officially bless their union. There are some groups and individual ministers who will perform such "holy unions".

Roman Catholic: Sister Gramick — God most assuredly approves of and hopes for loving feelings and actions on the part of all people. Whether these feelings and expressions are between people of the same or opposite genders is irrelevant.

It is a beautiful thing when two people pledge their love to each other, to care for each other in the rough times as well as the good times, to promise each other that they will walk as companions along life's journey. To deny a religious ceremony to two such people who love each other, merely because they happen to be of the same gender, seems unjust. Since God is a God of justice, one could logically argue that God approves of same gender couples pledging their love.

Love between two individuals should encourage them to share that love with others. Biological or adopted offspring are one means for same-sex and heterosexual couples to share that love with the human family.

Roman Catholic: Rev. Nugent — Catholic teaching is that genital sexual union has its true meaning in the context of heterosexual marriage grounded in the procreative and unitive dimensions of gender differences and sexual identity. This is the "norm" or what sexuality *ought* to be. It is the ideal form for full genital expression which is approved by God. Where we got this norm, whether it should be the only norm, and how or whether it applies to gay and lesbian people are critical questions today for some church groups and theologians. A norm can be upheld in general, but modified when applied to special unique cases. Behavior which goes against the general norm, might be acceptable for some people in unique and individual and exceptional cases as exceptions or accommodations. Gay and lesbian individuals who do not fit the heterosexual norm might be encouraged to embrace and affirm their own sexual reality and strive for the most human, loving and religious way to live their lives in keeping with fundamental values of stable family life, sacrificial love, faithful and life-giving relationships. A religious ceremony would say clearly that the couple took their relationship with God seriously and would also witness to the social impact of their relationship on others of the faith community. Caring for children born of prior heterosexual unions, adopted or foster children by a same-gender couple would not only be "approved" by God, but would be a serious religious obligation coming from one's belief in and commitment to God. The issue of procreation in a same-gender relationship through technology (artificial insemination, test tube babies, third-party donors, surrogate motherhood, etc.) raises more complex and serious ethical and legal issues about personal dignity, the nature of human sexuality and the rights and limitations connected with human life and technology.

Unitarian Universalist: Dr. Schulz — In my view "God" is not a person or a being but a term which can profitably be used to refer to the gracious plenum of Creation which presents itself to us in all its glory. Part of that glory is same-sex love. Thus, while it is not a matter of God "approving" or "disapproving" of certain behaviors or practices, same-sex love and the raising of children by same-sex couples is in my judgment fully consistent with the values which we glean from an apprehension of the gracious.

United Church of Christ: Dr. Lebacqz — (Does God approve of gay/lesbians individuals covenanting together and raising children?) Yes. Please note that I have used the term "covenant" here. It is my firm belief that gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to marry in the church just as heterosexual couples are allowed to marry. One of the best "marriages" I know is between a gay couple who have been together, monogamously, for 10 years and intend to be together for the rest of their lives. One of the best "families" I know is comprised of two lesbian women and their two adopted children. Those children are lucky to be in a home with so much love!

United Church of Christ: Dr. Nelson — Yes, I believe God deeply approves of loving, committed, same-sex covenants, and the parenting for such children as may come to them. I rejoice in those churches and synagogues that now celebrate such unions, and I pray for the day when many more will do so.

United Methodist: Dr. Cobb — I believe this pattern would be the one most pleasing to God of all the options available to gays and lesbians. Of course, the raising of children is not essential to a healthy relationship.

United Methodist: Bishop Wheatley — My affirmative answer is much stronger than an intellectual opinion; it is a conviction based upon experiential and relational reality. My wife and I personally know gay and lesbian couples who have pledged their love to each other in religious ceremonies, some of whom are raising children either born to them or adopted by them, whose committed relationships and family constellations are as blessed of God in every dimension of love and loyalty as we would dare claim our own among the families of our heterosexual friends are. This convinces us that God not only approves but also nurtures same-sex couples in their commitments to each other and in their extensions of loving care to those who may be added to their family.

Conclusion

Most of the religious leaders and theologians surveyed agreed that:

- God does not regard homosexuality as a sin. Several respondents regard a person's sexual orientation, be it heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual, as a "gift from God".
- The Scriptures were written before the word "homosexual" existed. Jesus is silent on the concept of homosexuality. Where the Scriptures object to certain types of same-gender and opposite-gender sexual expression, they do so because those actions were exploitative and oppressive, rather than loving and caring. The writers and interpreters of the Bible were influenced by the social, cultural, and moral attitudes of their time, and limited by the scientific knowledge then available.
- God approves of gays and lesbians pledging their love in a covenant of holy union and raising a family — provided each does so in a constructive, loving, nonselfish way and shows respect for the other's rights and dignity.

Discussion

The answers show that the respondents came from a background rich in religious knowledge, although they acquired that knowledge from different faiths, printed sources, and teachers. They weighed the value and meaning of their answers word by word. The responses show that in our search for truth, the authors and we all — including you the reader, and I, the editor of this booklet — must read as many books and listen to as many experts as time allows. Then, in the end, we take the best from what we have learned, retreat from work, family, and other influences, test our knowledge against our conscience, resolve any conflicts, and develop and find our own, independent truth.

When our own truth deviates from that of most people, it takes great courage to express and live by that truth. That is what the theologians and religious leaders who responded to our

survey have done. The Federation of Parents FLAG is grateful for their courage and insights.

For us humans, truth, as we see it, is never absolute — nor is it constant. Our search for truth is limited by the capacity of our comprehension and the environment from which we draw our knowledge. As we mature and gain new insights and experiences, we may adjust our concepts of truth, replace them with new concepts, or strengthen earlier ones.

Just as we expect others to respect our carefully developed concepts of truth, so should we tolerate and respect those of others, recognizing that many of us think differently.

As anticipated, the answers of the religious leaders are not all identical but they share many common beliefs:

Question 1: The writers generally felt that homosexual relationships are not sinful, as long as they are loving, respectful, honest, and safe. All that God creates is good; this includes human sexuality, be it lesbian, gay, bisexual, or heterosexual.

Question 2: The respondents are divided on whether the Scriptures object to homosexuality, but those who see such objections share the concern that the Biblical authors could not have helped being influenced by:

- A lower level of scientific knowledge and prejudice born of a lack of information;
- 2,000-year old cultural beliefs that no longer apply in the 20th or 21st century;
- An overwhelming concern for the survival of people, when procreation was of highest priority.

In other words, they hold the view that, although the authors of the Scriptures may have been inspired by God, the writers, translators, and interpreters were influenced by the culture, moral attitudes, and prejudices of the time in which they lived, and limited by the scientific knowledge of 2,000 years ago. We should also remember that, at that time, very few people could read or write and mass production of books through printing was unavailable. Most people were, therefore, dependent on the spoken word and human memory only, and if they disagreed, were not able to successfully challenge the writings of the powerful literates.

Also, the microscope and other scientific instruments designed to test the accuracy of prevailing beliefs were not invented until many hundreds of years later. This relative lack of scientific knowledge (by today's standards) is evident in the Scriptures:

- The Old Testament speaks of the sun circling around the earth (Genesis 1:14-19). However, in the 16th and 17th centuries, some scientists, including Galileo, discovered that the earth moves around the sun. Their theory aroused opposition from the authorities, i.e. the Church, and Pope Paul V forced Galileo to recant his statement in 1633. To save his life, Galileo withdrew his statement, but we know today that he was right, and that the earth indeed moves around the sun.
- In another example (1 Kings 3:19), the Bible speaks of mothers who in their sleep "overlaid their child," that is, when a baby was found dead in the morning and had shared the bed with the parents, the mother was accused of negligently smothering her baby with her own body. She was, therefore, driven out of town in shame. Today, however, we know that babies do occasionally die in their sleep of unknown causes, even when alone in their cribs (sudden infant death syndrome or SIDS). And although we are not sure even today what causes it, we know that parents carry no blame for SIDS.

We should also remember that some parts of the Bible were written at a time when scientists believed that a man's semen contained all the ingredients needed to produce a new life. They did not know that the woman's body contained the egg to be fertilized by the man's semen. The woman was regarded only as the "soil in which the embryo grows." (Singer, Charles: *A Short*

History of Anatomy and Physiology from the Greek to Harvey, 1957, page 24, Dover Publishers, Inc.). Therefore, in a period in history when underpopulation and a high mortality rate were a constant threat to human survival, any act of “wasting” semen outside the woman’s body, such as male homosexual acts, masturbation, and premature ejaculation, were considered sinful by religious leaders and their followers.

This rationale of 2,000 years ago is still evident in much of today’s thinking, preaching, literature, and legislation even though some regions of the world are threatened by overpopulation, rather than underpopulation, and despite the fact that scientists now generally believe that one’s sexual orientation is biologically determined at an early age and unchangeable. (See *Why Is My Child Gay?* published by the Federation of Parents FLAG). This ancient rationale is also responsible for today’s continued discrimination against gays by certain segments of society.

Until the beginning of the 16th century, Europe — from which most of America’s current laws and thinking are derived — was largely governed by the Roman Catholic Church and the Vatican. Since the 16th century Reformation, traditional Christian teaching has either avoided the issue of homosexuality, expressed opposition to it, or adopted the attitude “hate the sin, love the sinner.”

For example, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that homosexuality is not a choice that some people make. It states that some people have a homosexual orientation which is permanent and unchangeable (“Human Sexuality,” United States Catholic Conference, 1990). The Church also has a teaching which states that only those in a heterosexual marriage may engage in sexual relations. Therefore, the Roman Catholic Church does not consider a person’s homosexuality per se as sinful. It does, however, regard any sexual activity outside a legal marriage as sinful.

Other faiths base their continued opposition to homosexuality on the Scriptures. Adhering to the belief that it is wrong, their followers, anxious to lay blame, insist that homosexuality is a matter of individual choice and preference, or they hold parents responsible for bringing up a child who is gay. (This theory was disproven in the 1970s when a team of scientists, supported with funds from the National Institute of Mental Health, concluded that upbringing and other environmental factors alone cannot cause homosexuality. See *Why Is My Child Gay?*)

As a result of this continued negative attitude toward homosexuality, perpetuated by misinformed religious leaders, thousands of gays, lesbians and their parents have left their churches or synagogues, often amid much conflict and anguish. Some lesbians and gays are made to believe that God has rejected them and are encouraged to remain celibate. In the past, some gay men and lesbians joined the priesthood or convent. Other lesbians and gays and their families, feeling rejected by their faiths’ leaders, started working to establish support systems within their own denominations. This movement has resulted in an ever-growing number of religious organizations, such as “Dignity” and “Affirmation,” that are supportive of and minister to gays and lesbians, their families and friends.

Question 3: All respondents agreed that God sanctions committed relationships blessed by a priest, minister, or rabbi, as long as these “holy unions” or “marriages” are based on love, respect, caring and faithfulness and are not abusive or based on selfishness. It is interesting to note that, according to Professor John Boswell, Chair of the History Department at Yale University, the Roman Catholic Church sanctioned same-gender marriages before the 16th century. Possibly as a result of the Reformation, the tradition of same-gender wedding ceremonies fell into disuse in most localities and the written liturgy was filed away in confidential Vatican libraries.

Although the raising of children is not essential to a healthy relationship, most respondents believe that gay couples in such covenant relationships have an excellent opportunity to share their love and religion with children, be they biological or adopted.

We are living in a fast-paced world inherited from our ancestors full of rich resources and wisdom. Yet, as we split the atom, land on the moon, and develop vaccines against deadly diseases, we learn that earlier books of wisdom, including the Bible, may not always have held what we today know and believe to be the truth. We have to reinterpret and modify some ideas and concepts once believed to be the "Gospel" truth, including the notion that God considers homosexuality as wrong and sinful. Over the centuries, this misinterpretation of certain biblical passages has caused great suffering to millions of gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals. It is time that we right that wrong and start respecting all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation. It is time to celebrate the diversity of God's creation.

Recommended Reading:

Countryman, William. *Dirt, Greed, and Sex*.

Edwards, George R. *Gay/Lesbian Liberation: A Biblical Perspective*. New York: Pilgrim Press, 1984.

Gramick, Jeannine (ed). *Homosexuality and the Catholic Church*. Chicago: Thomas More, 1983.

Hasbany, Richard (ed). *Homosexuality and Religion*. New York: Haworth Press, 1989.

McNaught, Brian. *On Being Gay*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988.

McNeill, John. *Taking a Chance on God*. Boston: Beacon, 1988.

McNeill, John J. *The Church and the Homosexual* (3rd edition). Boston: Beacon 1988.

Nelson, James B. *Embodiment*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978.

Nugent, Robert (ed). *A Challenge to Love: Gay and Lesbian Catholics in the Church*. New York: Crossroad, 1983.

Nugent, Robert, & Gramick, Jeannine. *Homosexuality: Protestant, Catholic and Jewish Issues: A Fishbone Tale*. Mt.

Rainier, MD: New Ways Ministry, 1990.

Pennington, Sylvia, *Good News for Modern Gays*. Hawthorne, CA: Lambda Christian Fellowship.

Rose, Andy, and Balka, Christine (ed). *Twice Blessed: On Being Lesbian, Gay and Jewish*. Beacon Press.

Scanzoni, L., and Mollenkott, V.R. *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor? Another Christian View*. New York: Harper & Row, 1978.

Scroggs, Robin. *The New Testament and Homosexuality*.

Spong, Bishop John S. *Living in Sin? A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988, paperback edition, 1990.

Woods, Richard. *Another Kind of Love*. Ft. Wayne, IN: Knoll Pub. Co., 1988.

Gay and Lesbian Religious Groups:

Affirmation (Mormon). Box 46022, Los Angeles, CA 90046; 213/255-7251

Affirmation (United Methodist). Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204; 708/475-0499

American Baptists Concerned. 872 Erie Street, Oakland, CA 94610; 510/465-8652

Axios — Eastern & Orthodox Christian Gay Men & Women. 328 West 17th Street, #4-F, New York, NY 10011; 212/989-6211

Brethren/Mennonite Council for Lesbian & Gay Concerns. Box 65724, Washington, DC 20035-5724; 202/462-2595

Buddhist Association of the Gay and Lesbian Community. c/o Box 1974, Bloomfield, NJ 07003

Casa de Cristo Evangelical Church. 1029 E. Turney, Phoenix, AZ 85014; 602/265-2831

Christian Lesbians Out Together. Box 758, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130

Conference for Catholic Lesbians. Box 436, Planetarium Station, New York, NY, 10024; 718/921-0463

Dignity, Inc. (Roman Catholic). 1500 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 11, Washington, DC 20005; 202/861-0017

Emergence International (Christian Scientist). Box 581, Kentfield, CA 94914-0581; 415/485-1881

Evangelicals Concerned. c/o Dr. Ralph Blair, 311 East 72nd Street, Suite 1-G, New York, NY 10021; 212/517-3171

Evangelicals Together. 7985 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 109, PO Box 16, West Hollywood, CA 90046-0016; 213/656-8570

Friends for Lesbian/Gay Concerns (Quakers). Box 222, Sumneytown, PA 18084; 215/234-8424

Gay, Lesbians, and Affirming Disciples Alliance (Disciples of Christ). PO Box 19223, Indianapolis, IN 46219-0223; 319/324-6231

Honesty (Southern Baptist Convention). c/o David Tribble, 603 Quail's Run Road, #C-1, Louisville, KY 40207

Integrity, Inc. (Episcopal). Box 19561, Washington, DC 20036-0561; 201/868-2485 (New Jersey)

Lifeline, Inc. (all Baptists). c/o Rev. James T. Williams, Sr., M.D., 8150 Lakecrest Drive, PO Box 619, Greenbelt, MD 20770-0461

Lutherans Concerned. Box 10461, Ft. Dearborn Station, Chicago, IL 60610-0461

National Gay Pentecostal Alliance. Box 1391, Schenectady, NY 12301-1391; 518/372-6001

New Ways Ministry (Roman Catholic). 4012 29th Street, Mt. Rainier, MD 20712; 301/277-5674

Nichiren Association (Buddhist). Box 1935, Los Angeles, CA 90078

Presbyterians for Lesbian/Gay Concerns. James D. Anderson, Communication Secretary, Box 38, New Brunswick, NJ 08903-0038; Work: 908/932-7501; Home: 908/846-1510

Religious Science International. PO Box 2152, Spokane, WA 99210

Reformed Church in America Gay Caucus. Box 8174, Philadelphia, PA 19101-8174

Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International. Box 3840, Los Angeles, CA 90078-3840; West: 213/876-2076; East: 617/436-5950

Sovereignty (Jehovah's Witnesses). Box 27242, Santa , CA 92799

Unitarian Universalist Office for Lesbian & Gay Concerns. 25 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108; 617/742-2100

United Church Coalition for Lesbian/Gay Concerns. 18 N. College Street, Athens, OH 45701; 614/593-7301

United Lesbian and Gay Christian Scientists. Box 2171, Beverly Hills, CA 90213-2171; 213/850-8258

Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. 5300 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 304, Los Angeles, CA 90029; 213/464-5100

World Congress of Gay & Lesbian Jewish Organizations. Box 18961, Washington, DC 20036

Wingspan, St. Paul Reformation Lutheran Church. 100 N. Oxford Street, Saint Paul, MN 55104; 612/224-3371

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Tineke Boddé, author, is a professional writer who has received more than 15 communication awards during her 20-year career. She developed and edited the Federation's booklet *Why Is My Child Gay?*, of which more than 300,000 copies have been distributed since 1988. Ms. Boddé is the proud mother of a gay son and lives in Maryland.

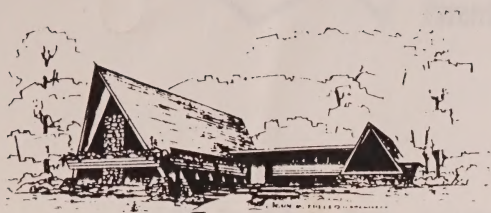
The Federation of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (Parents FLAG or P-FLAG), is active in every state of the U.S. and in other nations. Regular support meetings, assistance, and educational materials (in small quantities) are available locally. To obtain the phone number of the Parents FLAG affiliate nearest you, dial our 24-hour, toll-free number:

1-800-4-FAMILY

If you would like more information about other programs, membership, or Parents FLAG's other publications*, write to:

**Federation Parents FLAG
P.O. Box 27605
Washington, DC 20038-7605**

**Parents FLAG publishes booklets and papers on a wide range of topics, including: youth and homosexuality, HIV/AIDS, coming out, recommended reading and listening lists, and more.*



The Unitarian Church

*2365 Cahaba Road
Birmingham, Ala.*

MAILING ADDRESS:
P.O. BOX 530246
BIRMINGHAM, AL 35253

March 6, 1995

Dear Friend:

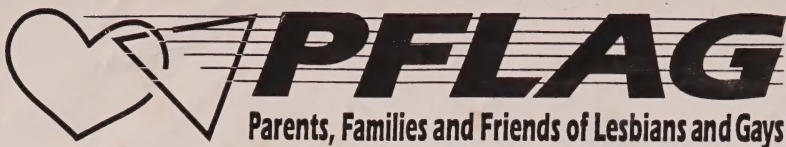
P-FLAG is a support, information and advocacy group for parents, family members and friends of gay and lesbian people. The Birmingham chapter of this national organization has been meeting for about six months offering a safe place to discuss issues of mutual concern.

I hope you will post the enclosed flyer and direct people in your church or community who might benefit from information or support to our meetings.

Sincerely,

Karen Matteson

KM/jh



683 Pelican Way, Delray Beach, Florida 33483

Dear Friend,

PFLAG is interested in starting a Chapter in your area and we sincerely need your help.

We are seeking volunteers to serve as group leaders, someone to find a donated facility, someone to place publicity, and a committment to attend the first meeting.

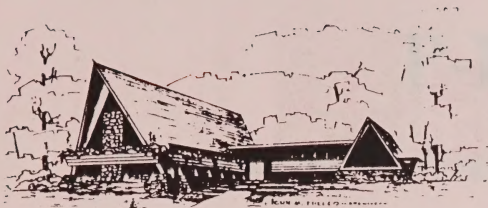
I look forward to working very closely with you. If you are interested in helping or attending, please give me a call at (407) 272-1634 and I will immediately get back to you.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Carole".

Carole Benowitz

Gulf Region Director
PFLAG



The Unitarian Church

2365 Cahaba Road
Birmingham, Ala.

MAILING ADDRESS:
P.O. BOX 530246
BIRMINGHAM, AL 35253

October 5, 1995

Rev. Marge Ragona
Covenant MCC
5117 1st Ave. N.
Birmingham, AL

Dear Rev. Ragona:

I want to let you know about a support group that may be helpful to some members of your congregation or organization.

P-FLAG is a support, information and advocacy group for parents, other relatives and friends of gay, lesbian and bisexual people. We also welcome gays, lesbians and bisexuals to the meetings. Typically, the monthly meetings focus on the concerns of the attendees and the sharing of support, information and experiences. Topics have included feelings about having a son or daughter "come out," health concerns, lifestyle issues, maintaining good relationships between gay and straight siblings, discrimination and religious concerns. Confidentiality is always strictly respected at meetings.

The Unitarian Church sponsors P-FLAG. Meetings are held on the 2nd Tuesday of each month, 7 - 9 pm, at the church. The next meeting is on October 10, 1995.

I hope you will publicize P-FLAG and encourage any in your community who might benefit from this group. Enclosed is a flyer and brochure.

I would be happy to talk to you or anyone interested in this important group if more information is desired.

In Peace,

Karen Matteson

Rev. Karen K. Matteson

KKM/jh
Enclosures

P-FLAG

(Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)

Meeting

*Second Tuesday of Every Month
7:00PM*

*Unitarian Church
2365 Cahaba Road
(Near the Zoo)*

[Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (P-FLAG) promotes the health and well being of gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons, their families, and friends through: support, to cope with an adverse society; education, to enlighten an ill-informed public; and advocacy, to end discrimination and to secure equal rights. P-FLAG provides opportunity for dialogue about sexual orientation, and acts to create a society that is healthy, and respectful of human diversity.]

Contact:

Karen Matteson
at the Unitarian Church
879-5150

P-FLAG

Parents and Friends of
Lesbians and Gays

Information and Organizational
Meeting

Tuesday, June 14
7:00 pm

Unitarian Church
2365 Cahaba Road
(near the zoo)

[Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays promotes the health and well-being of gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons, their families, and friends through: support, to cope with an adverse society; education, to enlighten an ill-informed public; and advocacy, to end discrimination and to secure equal rights. P-FLAG provides opportunity for dialogue about sexual orientation, and acts to create a society that is healthy, and respectful of human diversity.]

Contact: Karen Matteson: 879-5150

Joseph Tombrello: 787-5195 (h)
email: tomm @ phy.uab.edu

